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## Hastings College Social Research Center

June 13, 1994

James H. Wiest, Ph.D., Director

Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

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Enclosed are 1) a copy of our remarks to be delivered before the FCC en banc hearing on children's television (MM Docket No. 93-48) on June 28, 1994. Panel topic--The Economics of Providing Educational and Informational Programming for Children, 2) brief speaker biographies, and 3) a summary of our remarks.

### Speakers:

James H. Wiest, Ph.D.  
Professor of Sociology  
Director of Hastings College Social Research Center  
Hastings College, Hastings, NE 68902-0269.

Ronald D. Davis, Ed.D.  
Associate Professor of Broadcasting  
Director of Telecommunications  
Hastings College, Hastings, NE 68902-0269  
Other professional experiences include elementary school teaching, television production and television management.

### Summary of remarks:

We are currently conducting research to determine community definitions of children's instructional and educational needs which may be met through cost-effective television programming. Based on our research we have produced programming that has been aired locally. (Brief example of programming included). Our research plan involves continuing to evaluate how this programming captures the interest of children relative to other programming and whether children retain the information contained in the programming. We propose expanding this model to a regional level which includes a major market. Organizing a regional television cooperative of broadcasters could be the best way to study cost-effective methods to provide quality children's programming.

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**Remarks:**

Two fundamental problems block children's television reform. First, no one has given broadcasters a clear definition of educational and instructional needs or a way to demonstrate that they have been met. Second, even if broadcasters had the definition, they don't know how to produce good children's television without losing money.

At the Hastings College Social Research Center, we have been working on these two problems for more than a year. In that time we developed a research model for defining children's needs at the local level and implemented that design on a limited basis. From our research findings we formulated programming goals, and produced and aired four 30-minute experimental programs on our local ABC affiliate. The programs attracted advertisers, an audience and numerous volunteers to the production process. We think we have established that compelling programming could be produced at relatively low-cost while being directed by goals that benefit children. This is a sample of that programming and its goals.

**30-45 second video presentation showing program goals and program segments.**

We think we are on the right track, but what we have done is only a beginning. We are here today to ask you to support the concept of a more comprehensive study, one that would produce children's programming, based on research, at the regional level. Success at the regional level would provide a model for regions all over the country. Our proposal calls for the establishment of a regional children's television cooperative of broadcasters that would produce programming and research beyond the resources of any one member.

Ten to fourteen stations would comprise a regional cooperative, representing large, medium and small market stations. For example, Chicago could be a central large market that is surrounded by participating stations from Green Bay to Indianapolis. This region (seven to eight million households) would be large enough to establish a substantial revenue potential and small enough to maintain localism. The stations participating in the cooperative would be served by a central research-production facility. This facility would conduct research on the needs of children in the region using focus group interview techniques, as well as conduct marketing research, establish programming goals, coordinate production and measure its effects on children. Production would rely heavily on volunteerism, local community activities, attractions and personalities.

Volunteers can be organized as advisors, as a publicity network and as facilitators of activities that meet children's needs more directly. Volunteers can also be program resources. There is a great wealth of talent and information among the people of all communities, like teachers, athletes, musicians, television personalities and local heroes. The net effect would be a television program created by the community and for the community.

Programs should be designed to reach an age-specific audience of children who are accompanied by adults. This not only meets an educational need, it also serves to increase audience size, revenue potential and the scope of marketing.

If one regional cooperative is successful it can be replicated in other regions, creating a national network of cooperatives that can share resources even more efficiently. This would increase both program quality and revenue.

The general strategy of the study is to create an efficient environment that is focused on a singular purpose. That purpose is to determine, through research, the most cost-effective means to produce programs that meet the educational and instructional needs of

children. The study will help the FCC provide broadcasters with definitive, realistic requirements to meet children's needs.

If a 30-minute program aires daily throughout the test cooperative, at a time when children and adults can watch together (let's say 5:30 p.m.), then significant revenue can be produced. Six million dollars annually is not unrealistic. An even split of revenue will compensate member stations and provide plentiful funds for production. The size of the production budget will be based on actual revenue. Goals can be met even if revenue is far less than the example.

Once there is a clear potential to produce revenue, then start-up funds for the project can be found in any number of ways.


The big question is how to motivate broadcasters to guarantee the quality air time and take advantage of the cooperative. The FCC will probably have to influence broadcasters to participate.

The National Commission on Children in its 1991 report said that, "American children generally lack hopes and dreams or a vision of what their lives can become." Television can help: it is ubiquitous and non-punitive to children, it can communicate non-verbally and artfully, it conveys emotion, it can cost-effectively use pre-produced resources, and it can serve as a catalyst for community action. Television can help if it is used effectively.

Let's pursue a children's television cooperative. If it can be envisioned, it can be constructed and tested, and now is the time to get it done.

We have a variety of supplemental written information that we will make available upon request.

Sincerely,



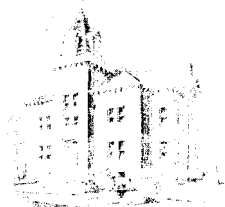
James H. Wiest and Ronald D. Davis

## About Hastings College...

Founded in 1882, Hastings College is a private, four-year, liberal arts college located on an 80-acre campus in Hastings, Nebraska. The college offers its 1000 students a full range of courses and academic majors. In addition to its undergraduate program, Hastings is one of the few colleges in the region with a master of arts in teaching program. Hastings College was named one of the nation's top liberal arts schools in *The National Review College Guide*.

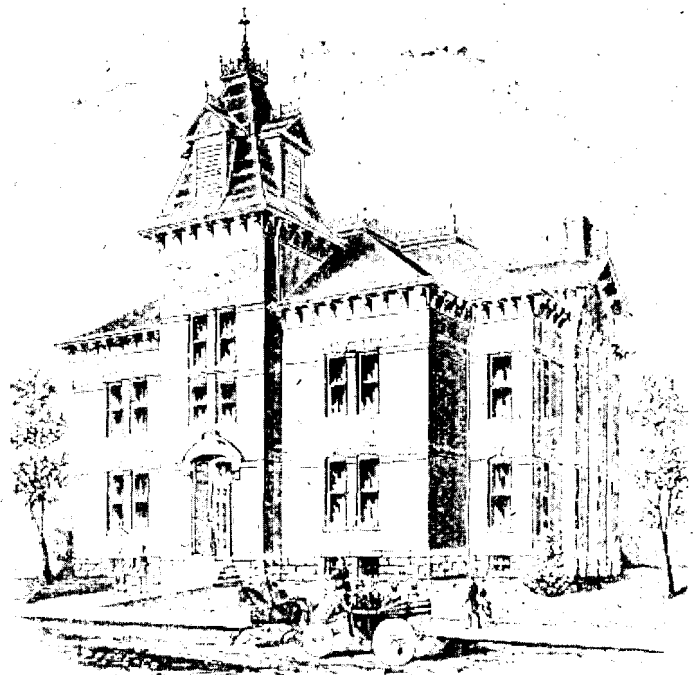
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## Hastings College Social Research Center



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Hastings, NE 68902-0269

# What is the HCSRC?

The Hastings College Social Research Center combines modern social science research methods with the academic traditions and resources of a respected liberal arts college. We serve the community by providing high quality research at the lowest possible cost. All projects are completed under the supervision of experienced professionals who oversee each step of the research process. The center employs the college's computer and communications technology, as well as the sophisticated equipment in the Gray Center for the Communication Arts, to collect and analyze data.

## Why use applied social science research?

Every organization makes decisions, but too often decisions are based on assumptions or conjecture. Applied social science research (marketing research) gathers and analyzes the specific information you need to make the best possible decisions. By using surveys, interviews, and other established research techniques, applied social science research can gauge public opinion, assess client attitudes, and provide greater insight into the needs and preferences of those you aim to serve.

## What services does the HCSRC provide?

- ◆ community surveys
- ◆ public opinion polls
- ◆ focus group interviews
- ◆ information and data analysis
- ◆ questionnaire design
- ◆ needs assessment studies
- ◆ mailed surveys
- ◆ workshops on various research topics
- ◆ consulting services

## Who can use these services?

We offer our services to individuals, businesses, government agencies, and organizations needing complete and accurate information to address a concern or solve a problem.

## Who staffs the HCSRC?

James H. Wiest, Ph.D., Director of the HCSRC, supervises students and faculty members engaged in center-sponsored research projects. A faculty member in the Sociology Department at Hastings College since 1977, Wiest earned a doctorate in sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is a member of the American Sociological Association and the Society for Applied Sociology.